(54) Title: CONSTANT PACE CARD GAME
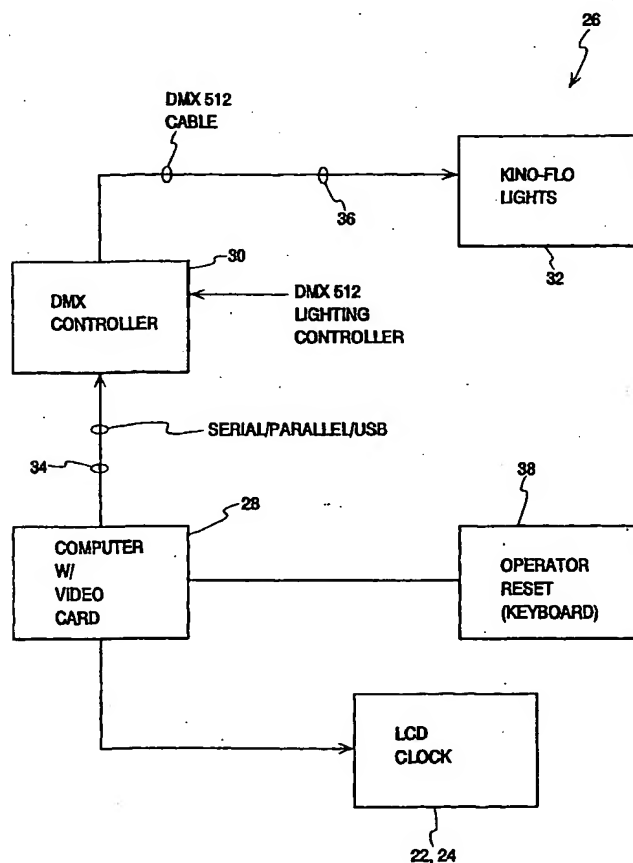
(57) Abstract: The present invention relates to a method for maintaining a relatively steady pace in a card game and enhancing the drama, associated with the game, such as a poker game. The method may be used with virtually any poker game to maintain a relatively constant pace in a poker tournament. In essence, as play passes to a player, the player is given a predetermined time period within which to play the hI-.nd before a restriction or penalty is imposed on the player. By limiting the amount of time for a player to play a turn, the pace of card game will be relatively constant. In order to further enhance the interest of the viewing audience in the game, visual effects may optionally be provided to provide an indication to the players, as well as the viewing audience, of the time period.

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ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, MC, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Declarations under Rule 4.17:

—   *as to applicant's entitlement to apply for and be granted a patent (Rule 4.17(ii)) for the following designations AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NA, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, SY, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, UZ, VC, VN, YU, ZA, ZM, ZW, ARIPO patent (BW, GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, MC, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG)*

—   *as to the applicant's entitlement to claim the priority of the earlier application (Rule 4.17(iii)) for the following designations AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NA, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, SY, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, UZ, VC, VN, YU, ZA, ZM, ZW, ARIPO patent (BW, GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, MC, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG)*

Published:

—   *with international search report*

For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

CONSTANT PACE CARD GAME

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

[0001]   The present invention relates to a system for maintaining a relatively

constant pace of a card game and enhances the drama of the game, such as a poker

game, and optionally provides visual effects which indicate one or more stages of a card

game, such as the expiration of a predetermined time for a player to take action.

2. Description of the Prior Art

[0002]   Card games, such as poker games, have experienced an increasing

amount of popularity over the years. Indeed, poker tournaments have become a

spectator sport that is normally televised before a live studio audience and broadcast

over one of the television networks at a later date. Unlike other spectator sports, the

actions and movement of the players in a poker game are fairly minor. In order to

maintain interest of the studio audience as well as the interest of the television

audience, various exhibition techniques have been used. For example, U.S. Patent

No. 5,451,054 relates to a use of a custom poker table configured with a plurality of card viewing windows adjacent to each player station. The card viewing windows are built into the playing surface of the poker table and enable each player to place their cards face down so that the players' cards can be displayed to the viewing audience without revealing the cards to the other players.

[0003]   With a custom poker table as disclosed in the '054 patent, a video camera is disposed beneath the card viewing window. Unfortunately, while the cards are being viewed by the viewing audience, the poker game is continuing in the background, out of view of the viewing audience. Thus, even though the player's hand is displayed by way of the card viewing window, the viewing audience misses a portion of the poker game while the players' cards are being displayed.

[0004]   In order to solve these problems and to maintain the interest of the viewing audience, improved exhibition techniques have been developed. For example, commonly owned U.S. Patent Application No. 10/353,319, filed on January 29, 2003, assigned to the same assignee as the assignee of the present invention, discloses a method for exhibiting a card game in which graphic and text data are selectively superimposed on video frames of the card game in progress in a relatively unobtrusive manner in order to inform the viewing audience of each player's hands and each player's bets while allowing the viewing audience to continue watching the game in progress.

[0005]   The amount of time for a poker hand to be played may be limited in some situations, in order to prevent a player from taking an inordinate amount of time to play a hand and potentially lose the interest of the audience in the game. For example, poker

tournaments are governed by rules of the Tournament Directors' Association (TDA)

(www.thepokerforum.com/tda.htm). The TDA is formed from a group of poker room

managers, tournament directors, and players from around the country with an objective

to draft a standardized set of rules for poker tournaments around the world. One such

rule governs the amount of time for playing a hand is covered by TDA Rule 4

(www.thepokerforum.com/tdarules.htm). This Rule 4 may be used by any of the players

to limit the amount of time of another player that is taking an inordinate amount of time

to play a hand. The rules may be invoked by any player requesting the tournament

director to call for a "clock procedure." The clock procedure is governed by TDA Rule 4

as set forth below.

[0006]   "4.   Calling for the clock procedures, once a reasonable
               amount of time has passed and a clock is called for, a player
               will be given one minute to make a decision. If action has not
               been taken by the time the minute is over, there will be a
               10-second countdown. If the player has not acted on his
               hand by the time the countdown is over, the hand will be
               dead."

[0007]   When a clock procedure is called for, the tournament director then times

the player's response. If the player has not responded within the specified time period,

the hand is declared dead. In some known poker tournaments, the end of the time

period for playing a hand in such a situation was indicated by a buzzer.

[0008]   Although the clock procedure is available for placing time limits on a

player who takes an inordinate amount of time to play a hand, such a procedure is

infrequently invoked. Thus, during normal poker play when the clock procedure is not

invoked, no time limits exist for players to play their hands. Thus, the pace of the poker

tournament may vary, potentially causing at least intermittent decrease in interest in the

game by the viewing audience. Thus, there is a need to maintain a relatively steady

pace in poker tournaments in order to maintain a relatively constant interest in the

tournament by the viewing audience.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0009]   The present invention relates to a method for maintaining a relatively

steady pace of a card game and enhancing the drama associated with a game, such as

a poker game. The method may be used with virtually any poker game to maintain a

relatively constant pace, for example, in a poker tournament. In essence, as play

passes to a player, the player is given a predetermined time period within which to play

the hand before a subsequent action is taken which could result in the player's hand

being declared dead. By limiting the amount of time for a player to play a turn, the pace

of card game will be relatively constant. In order to further enhance the interest of the

viewing audience in the game, visual effects may optionally be provided to provide an

indication to the players, as well as the viewing audience, of the time period. For

example, in one embodiment of the invention, a so-called "shot clock" may be provided.

The shot clock may be an analog or digital clock that is disposed in view of the players,

as well as the viewing audience. As such, when play passes to a player, the shot clock

may be configured to count down from a predetermined time period, for example, sixty

seconds. Additional visual indications may also be provided. For example, at the end of

the predetermined time period, various visual lighting effects, such as pulsating studio

lighting and/or changing colors of the studio lighting, may be provided to indicate the

end of the predetermined time period or intermediate intervals thereof.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

[0010]   These and other advantages of the present invention will be readily understood with reference to the following specification and attached drawing wherein:

[0011]   FIG. 1 is an exemplary block diagram of an exemplary embodiment of the invention illustrating the use of a clock and lighting effects used to provide visual indication of the amount of time that a player has to play a hand.

[0012]   FIG. 2A is an exemplary embodiment of a digital shot clock for use with the present invention.

[0013]   FIG. 2 is an exemplary embodiment of an analogue shot clock for use with the present invention.

[0014]   FIG. 3 is an exemplary embodiment of a control panel for controlling the system illustrated in FIG. 1.

[0015]   FIG. 4 is an exemplary timing diagram illustrating the steady on and different rates of pulsing of the lighting effects in accordance with one aspect of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0016]   The present invention relates to a method for maintaining a relatively steady pace of a card game and enhancing the drama associated with the game, such as a poker game. Although the following description and attached drawings essentially relate to poker games, it will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that the principles of the present invention are virtually applicable to virtually any card game.

[0017]   The method for maintaining the pace of the card game is particularly useful in poker tournaments with virtually any of the unrecognized or recognized poker

games, such as Texas Hold'em; Omaha Hold'em; Seven-Card Stud; Mississippi Seven-Card Stud; Razz (Seven-Card Stud Low); Seven-Card Stud High/Low; Lowball; Straw High; Draw Jacks-or-Better; or No Limit & Top Limit. The poker rules for each of these games are available, for example, at thepokerforum.com (www.thepokerforum.com/pokerrules.htm), hereby incorporated by reference. In any of these poker games, as well as any other card game, in accordance with the present invention, once play passes to a player, the time limit for that player to play a turn is limited by a predetermined time period in order to maintain the pace of the game, as well as a poker tournament. As such, the level of drama and therefore interest of the viewing audience, including live and television audiences, is maintained.

[0018] In order to further enhance the interest of the viewing audience in the card game, visual effects may optionally be provided which provide an indication of the amount of time for a player to play a hand before a subsequent action is taken, which could result in the player's hand being declared dead. In exemplary embodiments of the invention, different forms of visual effects may be provided to provide an indication to the players, as well as to the viewing audience, of the amount of time a player has to play a hand. In accordance with the present invention, individual, or combinations of, visual effects may be provided.

[0019] In one embodiment of the invention, a so-called "shot clock" may be provided. Exemplary shot clocks are illustrated in FIGS. 2A and 2B and are identified with the reference numerals 20 and 22, respectively. FIG. 2A represents a digital clock 20, while FIG. 2B illustrates an analog clock 22. Either of these clocks may be used to provide an indication of the time period a player has for playing a hand. As will be

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discussed in more detail below, these shot clocks 20, 22 are reset by an operator every time play shifts to a new player. As play shifts, the clocks 20, 22 may be used to provide an indication of the remaining time available for a player to play a hand before or after subsequent action is taken. For example, after a first predetermined time period, a form of penalty or restriction may be imposed on the player. One form of penalty or restriction at the expiration of a first predetermined time period is that the player's hand is declared dead. Another form of penalty or restriction is that the player is forced to play the hand within a second time period before being declared dead. Other penalties are also contemplated.

[0020]   A sixty-second time period may be optionally selected as the first predetermined time period selected. In this case, a two-digit digital clock 20 may be used, as illustrated FIG. 2A. The digital clock 20 may be configured to count up to sixty or down from sixty. Alternatively, an analog clock 22 may be used as the shot clock. The analog clock 22 may be provided with a sweep hand 24, which may be configured to sweep either in a clockwise direction or in a counter-clockwise direction.

[0021]   Various types of clocks may be used for the shot clocks 20 and 22. For example, the shot clocks may be physical hardware clocks or software clocks, well within the ordinary skill in the art. Both hardware and software clocks can be used to display the time period to the players, as well as to the viewing audience. In the case of the digital hardware shot clock 20, a pair of seven segment displays may be used. Alternatively, the digital shot clock 20 may be generated by way of a character generator by way of a personal computer and displayed and on a display, such as a liquid crystal display. U.S. Patent No. 5,293,354 discloses a remotely controlled digital

hardware shot clock, hereby incorporated by reference. U.S. Patent No. 5,821,914

discloses an apparatus for generating an analog software clock on an LCD. All such

embodiments are considered to be within the broad scope of the present invention.

[0022]   In accordance with another aspect of the invention, lighting effects may

also be provided to provide indications of when the time period for a player taking action

has lapsed, as well as of intermediate times before the expiration of the time period. An

exemplary embodiment of such a system is illustrated in FIG. 1 and generally identified

with the reference numeral 26. The control system 26 may include a personal computer

28, for example. The personal computer 28 may be coupled to a DMX controller 30.

[0023]   The DMX controller 30 is a known device for controlling lighting devices,

for example, the lighting devices 32, utilizing a protocol developed by the Engineering

Commission of the United States Institute for Theater Technology, Inc. (USITT) in 1986.

The DMX protocol is used for digital control of lighting devices 32. Such DMX

controllers are extremely well known in the art and allow up to 512 different lighting

devices to be controlled. The DMX controller 30 may be used to convert serial, parallel

or USB data from the personal computer 28 into DMX 512 protocol.

[0024]   As shown in FIG. 1, a serial, parallel or USB connector is connected to an

available serial, parallel or USB port on the personal computer 28. The serial, parallel or

USB data is coupled to the DMX controller 30 by way of a cable 34. The output of the

DMX controller 30 may be coupled to external lighting devices 32 by way of a DMX 512

cable 36. As mentioned above, the DMX controller 30 has 512 channels, which allows

up to 512 different lighting devices to be digitally controlled.

[0025]   The DMX controller 30 may be a Whole-Hog PC controller, as

manufactured by High End Systems, Austin, Texas. The DMX controller 30 may be a

standalone unit, identified as a Wholehog II unit or a software module, identified as

Wholehog PC unit, that can be uploaded into a personal computer having a Pentium II

400 MHz or higher processor, a Microsoft Windows 2000 operating system, and at least

8 Mbytes of hard disk space. The Wholehog software PC module is described in detail

in the *Wholehog PC Handbook,* hereby incorporated by reference, available at

www.flyingpig.com. Programming of the Wholehog II controller, whether on the

standalone unit or on the Wholehog PC, is discussed in detail in Wholehog II Handbook

Version 4.0, Whole Hog II Hog Unit Supplement, Version 3.1, available at

www.highend.com, hereby incorporated by reference.

[0026]   The lighting devices 32 may be as manufactured by Kinoflow, Inc.,

Sun Valley, California (www.kinoflow.com). The lighting devices 32 may simply be

twenty-four banks of dimmable ballast fluorescent lights. For two-stage color effects,

both white fluorescent lights and white fluorescent lights covered with a colored gel, for

example, a red gel, available from High End Systems, may be utilized.

[0027]   An operator reset 38 may be provided to enable an operator backstage to

control playback of the light effects. The operator reset may simply be a mouse.

A mouse may be used to interact with an optional graphical user interface, for example,

the exemplary graphical user interface 40, illustrated in FIG. 3. The graphical user

interface 40 may be configured with a plurality of exemplary buttons 42–52 for

controlling the shot clock 20, 22, as well as a plurality of buttons 54–60 for controlling

the lighting devices 32. A user-programmable dialog box 62 may also be provided to

enable the predetermined time to be programmed by the user. As shown, the dialog box
62 is shown with the number *60* representing sixty seconds. The buttons 42–52 are
used to control the clock 20, 22. The **SET** button 42 may be used to set the time for the
system. In particular, any time the designated time period in the dialog box 62 is
changed, the **SET** button 42 is asserted to set the time. The **SET 60** button may be
used to set the time period at sixty seconds. The **START** button 48 may be used to start
the shot clock 20, 22. A **STOP** button 50 may be used to stop the shot clock 20 and 22.
A **CLEAR** button 52 may be used to clear the timing period of the shot clock to enable a
new time period to be set. The **RESTART 60** button 46 may be used to restart the shot
clock 20 and 22 with a sixty-second time period.

[0028]   As indicated above, the buttons 54–60 are for lighting control. The
KINOFLOW ON button 54 may be used to turn on the white lights only. The **RED ON**
button 56 may be used to turn on the red lights. The **ALL ON** button 58 may be used to
turn on all of the lights, both red and white, while the **ALL OFF** button may be used to
turn off all of the lights.

[0029]   As mentioned above, the graphical user interface 40 is merely exemplary
and may be used to facilitate operation of the system. Other controls may be used to
initiate the lighting effects discussed above, such as hardware and combination
hardware/software controls, all within the ordinary skill in the art. Also such
embodiments are considered to be within the broad scope of the present invention.

[0030]   FIG. 4 illustrates an exemplary method for programming the lighting
devices 32. In particular, a sixty-second time period may be selected. This time period
may be broken down into three periods t_1, t_2 and t_3. Time period t_1 may be, for example,

thirty seconds. The line 62 may be used to indicate a steady-on condition for the white

lights. Thus, as shown, the white lights are on steady for a period of thirty seconds. After

thirty seconds, the white lights may be programmed to pulse at a first rate, indicated by

the pulses 64 and 66 for the time period t_2. The white lights may be programmed to

pulse, for example, during time period t_2, up to fifty seconds, for example. After time

period t_2, the lighting devices 32 may be programmed to pulse at a relatively faster

pulse rate, as indicated by the pulses 68 and 70, until the end of the time period t_3,

which, as shown, is sixty seconds. At the end of sixty seconds, the system may be

programmed to turn the white lights and turn on the red lights for a predetermined time

period and then reset to a steady-on position.

[0031]   In operation, the system 26 (FIG. 1) may be reset by an operator reset,

such as a mouse, when the game play transfers to a new player. In the exemplary

embodiment illustrated in FIG. 3, the operator may, after setting the timing period, for

example, to sixty seconds as shown, click on the **RESTART** 60 button 46 or the **START**

button 48 after the system has been set for the predetermined time period. At the

conclusion of the sixty-second time period, as discussed above, the system may be

programmed to automatically turn off the white lights and turn on the red lights for a

predetermined time period, such as five seconds. After the timing period for the red

lights expires, the white lights may be turned back on and remain on until the operator

initiates the timing period when play transfers to a new player.

[0032]   Referring back to FIG. 1, the personal computer 28 may also be used to

control the shot clock 22, 24. In one exemplary embodiment, the shot clock 20, 22 may

be a software-generated soft shot clock which is displayed on an LCD. In this

embodiment, the personal computer 28 may be provided with a video card, for example, a Matrox Digi-Suite LE video card. The video card may be used to drive the LCD to provide a software-generated shot clock, as discussed above. The shot clock may also be a hardware shot clock, driven by the personal computer 28, and may consist of, for example, a hardware shot clock, as disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,293,354, hereby incorporated by reference.
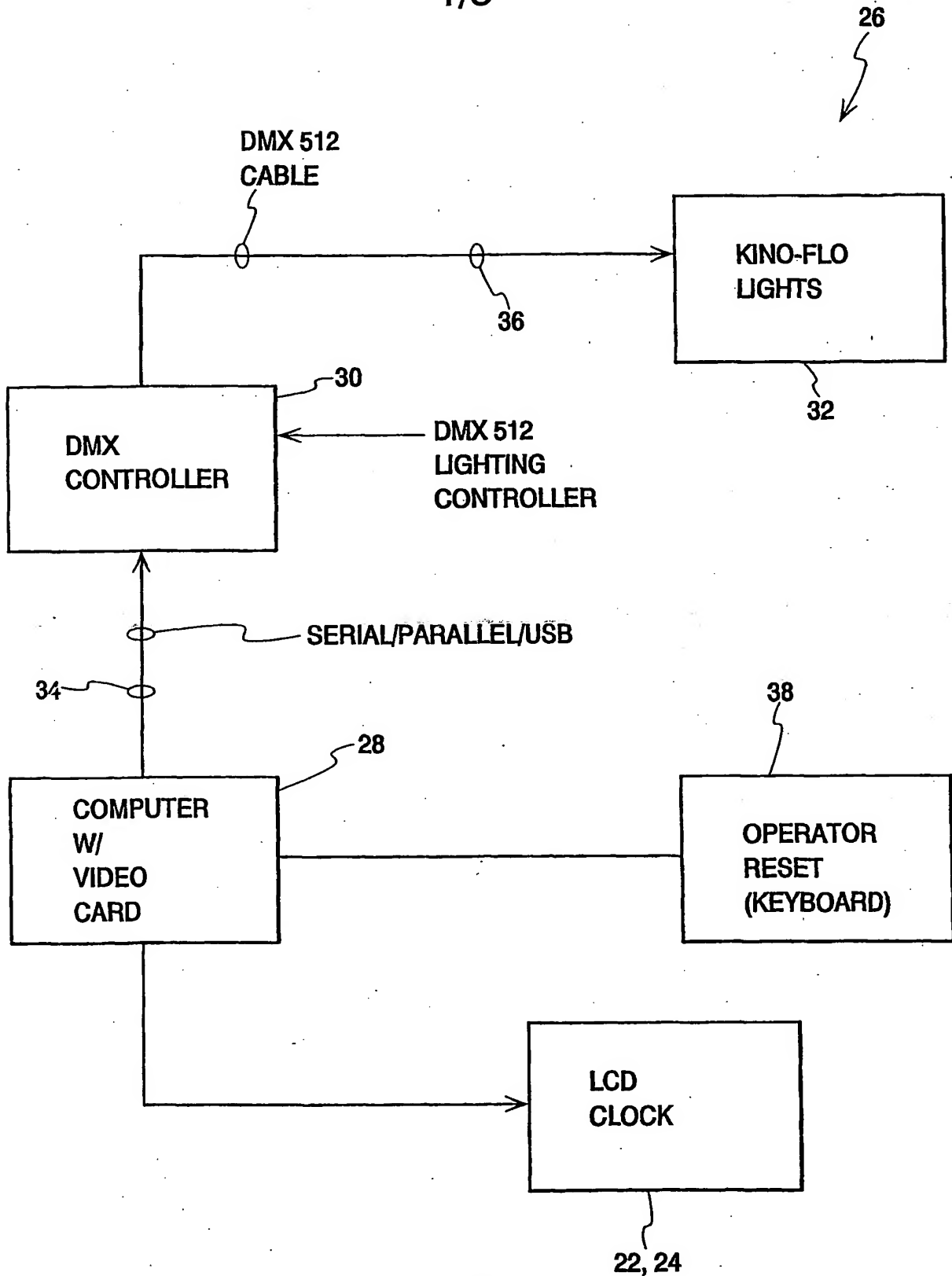
[0033]   Obviously, many modifications and variations of the present invention in light of the above teachings. Thus, it is to be understood that, within the scope of the appended claims, the invention may be practiced otherwise than as specifically described above.

[0034]   What is claimed and desired to be secured by a Letters Patent of the United States is:

CLAIMS

1.   A method for controlling the pace of a card game comprising the steps of:

monitoring the play of a predetermined card game having more than one player;

sensing each time when play passes to a player; and

imposing a restriction on a player that does not take action within a first predetermined time period.

2.   The method as recited in claim 1, further including the step of providing a shot clock for measuring said first predetermined time period.

3.   The method as recited in claim 2, further including the step of providing visual effects indicative of the end of said first predetermined time period.

4.   The method as recited in claim 3, further including the step of providing visual effects of predetermined intervals within said first predetermined time period.

5.   The method as recited in claim 1, wherein said monitoring step comprises monitoring the play of a poker game.

6.   The method as recited in claim 1, wherein said restriction is declaring the player's hand dead at the end of said first predetermined time period.

7.   The method as recited in claim 1, wherein a subsequent time period is initiated and the player's hand is declared dead at the end of the subsequent time period if the hand is not played by the expiration of the first time period.

DMX 512
CABLE

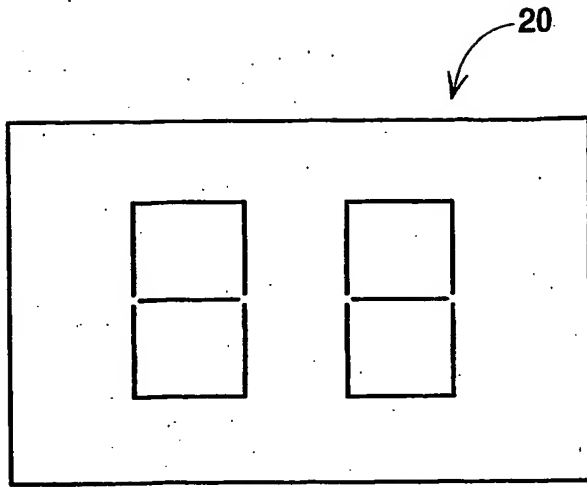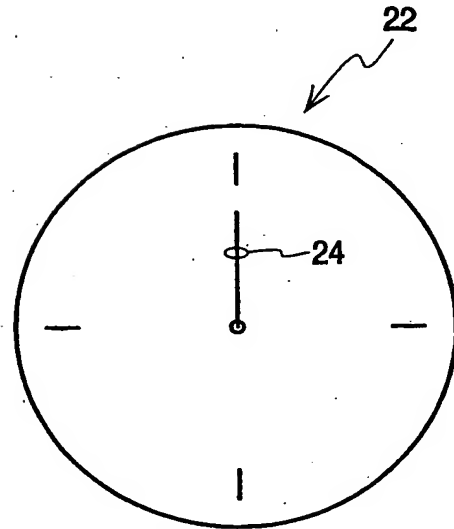36

KINO-FLO
LIGHTS

32

30

DMX
CONTROLLER

DMX 512
LIGHTING
CONTROLLER

SERIAL/PARALLEL/USB

34

28

38

COMPUTER
W/
VIDEO
CARD

OPERATOR
RESET
(KEYBOARD)

LCD
CLOCK

22, 24

Fig. 1

2/3

Fig. 2A

Fig. 2B

Fig. 3

CLOCK	
SET	START
SET 60	STOP
RESTART 60	CLEAR

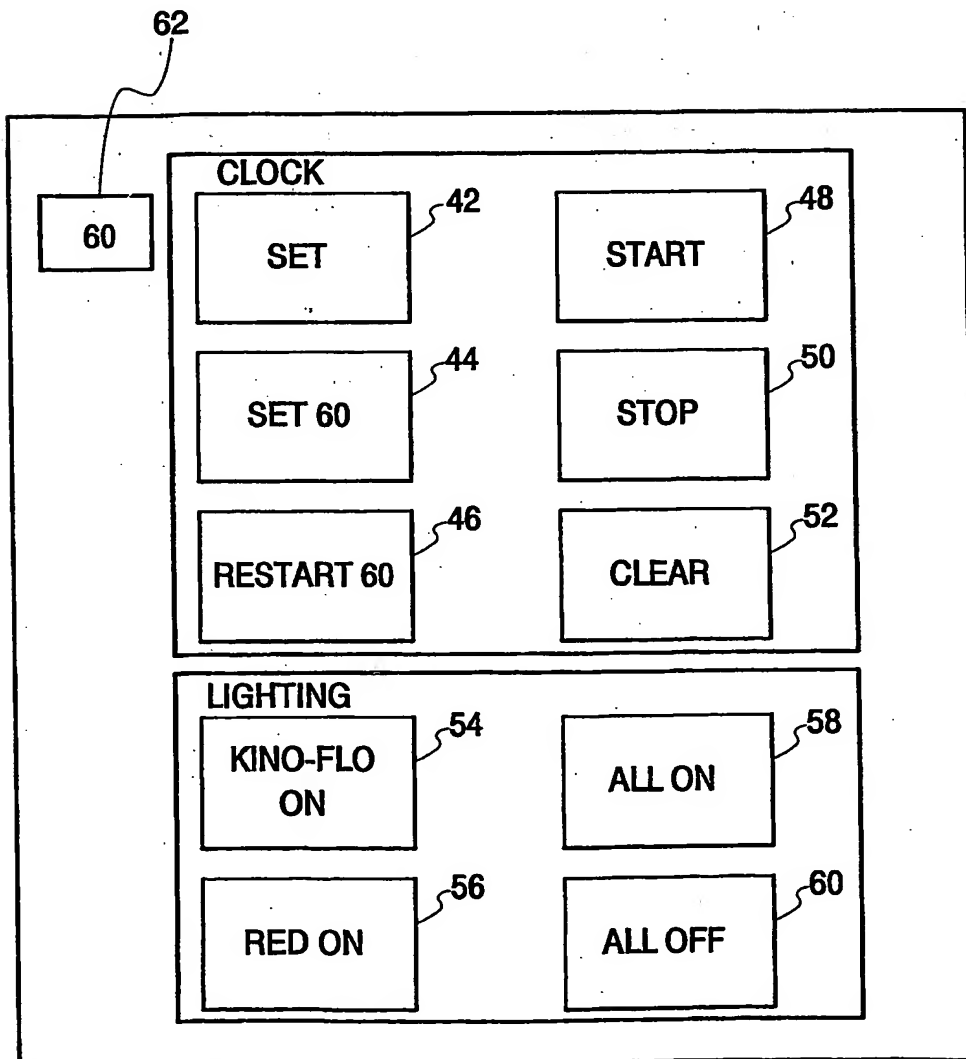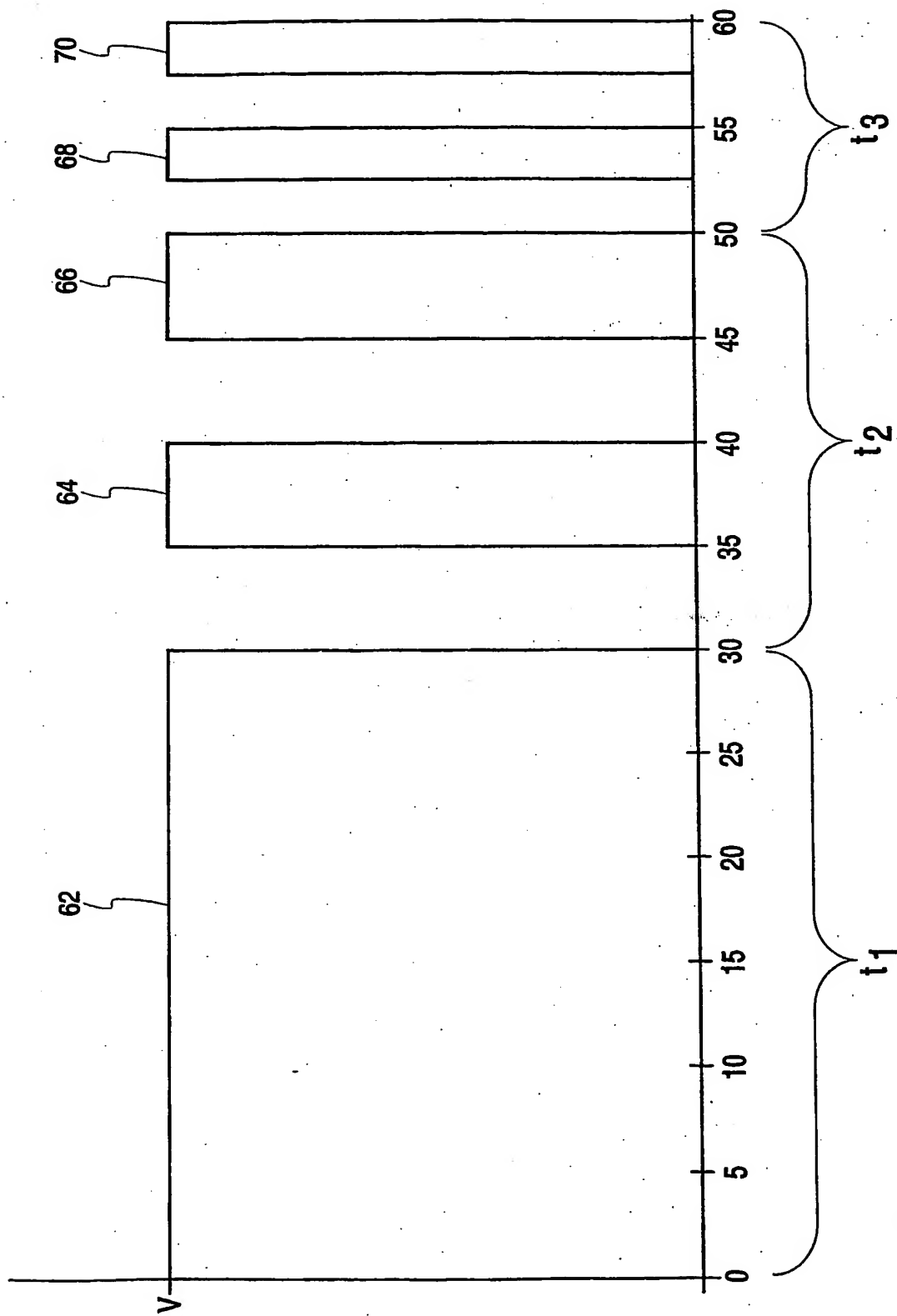| LIGHTING	
KINO-FLO ON	ALL ON
RED ON	ALL OFF

3/3

Fig. 4

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US05/02567

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) : A63F 1/00
US CL : 273/292; 463/12

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
 U.S. : 273/292, 274, 309, 148R, 148B; 463/12, 13, 25, 40, 42

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)
East -- card, tournament, hour glass, amount, limit

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 2003/0070178 A1 (BOYD ET AL) 10 APRIL 2003 (10.04.2003), SEE ENTIRE DOCUMENT.	1-7

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.   ☐ See patent family annex.

	Special categories of cited documents:	"T"	later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
"A"	document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"X"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
"E"	earlier application or patent published on or after the international filing date		
"L"	document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"Y"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
"O"	document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means		
"P"	document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	"&"	document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
28 April 2005 (28.04.2005)	**06 MAY 2005**
Name and mailing address of the ISA/US	Authorized officer
Mail Stop PCT, Attn: ISA/US Commissioner for Patents P.O. Box 1450 Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1450 Facsimile No. (703) 305-3230	Linda J Sholl Telephone No. (571) 272-4391

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